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ABSTRACT

This guide suggests that truancy is not just a school problem but a community problem, and the whole community needs to come together to devise solutions. This monthly action kit provides tools to help communities combat truancy. It contains: (1) important facts about truancy; (2) some ideas on how to assess the local problem; (3) actions that can be taken in the community; (4) elements of a comprehensive strategy; (5) information on creating effective afterschool programs for youth; (6) six descriptions of programs in other communities; (7) tips from other community leaders; and (8) five resources for more information about truancy. (SLD)

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1998 Monthly Action Kit

ED 426 160

Keeping Kids in School:

Part of your communitywide strategy to reduce substance abuse and crime

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August 1998

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STRATEGY MATTERS!

Communities across the country tell us that if they have a written strategy and involve a wide range of groups in their efforts to fight substance abuse, they are more likely to be effective. That is why each of Join Together's Monthly Action Kits presents some of the components of an effective strategy and gives you some ideas on how you can apply them to your own work. To help you think strategically, we encourage you to ask yourself the following basic questions:

1. **What harms from substance abuse are you trying to reduce in your community?**

2. **How are you accomplishing this?**

3. **Who else in your community is already involved? What other groups could get involved?**

4. **How can you work collaboratively with others?**

5. **How will you know you are making a difference?**

Strategies should be comprehensive and address prevention, treatment, public safety/law enforcement, jobs and economic development.

KEEPING KIDS IN SCHOOL: PART OF YOUR COMMUNITYWIDE STRATEGY TO REDUCE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CRIME

In some communities, as many as 30 percent of students miss school on any given day, and many of these absences are unexcused. When kids miss school repeatedly, they put themselves at risk for a host of other problems. Kids who are truant are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, commit crimes, be involved in gangs, and engage in a host of other negative behaviors. Of course, this does not mean that all truant youth use drugs or get into trouble. Some kids may miss school because of family problems, lack of transportation, or because they need to work to earn money. Often, truancy is a symptom of a family that needs help.

Regardless of ***why*** kids skip school, it is important that communities offer them the support they need to help break the pattern. Truancy is not just a school problem, but a community problem; therefore, it takes the whole community to come together to devise solutions. Communities that ignore truancy are saying that they don't care about the wellbeing of their kids, while those communities that take the time and the resources to prevent and respond to truancy are sending the message that ***these young people matter***.

Every community and state has different laws in terms of truancy, and different types of fines and penalties. Some states force parents to pay a penalty when their children skip school, while some municipalities enforce daytime curfews to force kids off the streets and into the classroom. But in general, punitive measures are not enough to stop the widespread problem of truancy. Experience tells us that incentives must exist to make kids ***want*** to go to school. And the most effective strategies are those that take into account the local situation. It does no good to respond to national trends if these are not reflective of the local picture; rather, communities must assess the reasons that kids skip school in their area and develop programs that address the specific needs.

For instance, in Santa Barbara, Calif., the district attorney used drug-forfeiture money to create an anti-truancy program after recognizing that many students who skipped school there also used alcohol and drugs. The D.A. partnered with the local Fighting Back initiative, the schools and the youth service system to reach out to truant youth and involved them in a number of positive activities. And in Waco, Texas, a broad partnership involving local school districts, a hospital, the city recreation department, the community arts center, and a local council on alcohol and drug abuse provides afterschool programs including arts and crafts, tutoring and health care services for kids, many of whom have no where to go after classes end. As a result of this effort, 57 percent of students have improved their school attendance.

Programs such as these are making a real difference. Your community, too, may want to assess your truancy problem and address it as part of your strategy to reduce substance abuse and crime, since all of these issues are so strongly interrelated. This latest Monthly Action Kit provides you the following tools to help you get started:

- important facts about truancy;
- some ideas of how to assess the local problem;
- actions you can take in your own community;
- elements of a comprehensive strategy;
- information on how to create effective afterschool programs for youth;
- examples of what others are doing;
- tips from other community leaders;
- resources for more information about truancy.

To download back issues of Join Together's Monthly Action Kits, which focus on a wide range of topics, go to Join Together Online at **www.jointogether.org.** For more information, call Lisa Falk at (617) 437-1500 or send an email to: lisa@jointogether.org

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THE FACT IS. . .

Truancy is a widespread problem facing communities today. Consider the following facts:

- Youth who are truant greatly increase their risk for dropping out of school. And high-school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, on welfare, or to end up in prison than students who graduate from high school or college. This information comes from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

- Several studies have documented the connection between drug use and truancy. A report from the University of Maryland Center for Substance Abuse Research found that 51 percent of female juvenile detainees not in school at the time of their arrests tested positive for drug use.

- Another study by the U.S. Department of Justice's Drug Use Forecasting (DUF) program reported that more than half (53 percent) of a group of 403 male juvenile arrestees in San Diego, California, tested positive for drug use when taken to juvenile hall. Those who did not attend school were more likely (67 percent versus 49 percent) to test positive for drug use than those who did attend.

- School-age children and teens who are unsupervised during the hours after school are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults. In a 1994 Harris poll, over one-half of teachers singled out "children who are left on their own after school" as the primary explanation for students' difficulties in class. This information comes from the National Education Commission on Time and Learning.

- Students with low reading scores are more likely to exhibit delinquent behavior than their peers who read well, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

- Truancy can be costly to communities, since state education funding typically is based on actual attendance. Unexcused absences can cost a school system millions of dollars in lost revenue. Society also pays in escalated costs to business for reeducation and retraining, along with the costs associated with arrest, prosecution, and incarceration of truants who commit delinquent acts. This information comes from the Department of Justice.

Some communities are responding to truancy problems by enacting tough measures to keep kids in class. For instance:

- Truancy has become such a significant problem that some cities are now passing ordinances allowing police to issue a citation to either the parent or the truant, which can result in a $500 fine or 30 days in jail for the parent and suspension of the youth's license to drive. In addition to fining parents, courts can order them to attend parenting classes and hold them in contempt of court if they do not attend. In some cases the court may take a child away from a parent and make the child a ward of the court.

- More and more cities in the United States are enforcing curfews in an attempt to reduce truancy and crime, and to encourage parents to discipline their children. A survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors found that 276 of 347 responding cities had a nighttime curfew, and seventy-six had a daytime curfew as well.

- According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors' survey, 56 percent, or 154, of the surveyed cities have had a youth curfew for at least 10 years. Officials in half these cities say juvenile crime has dropped since the curfew was imposed; 11 percent say the number of juvenile crimes has remained steady; and 10 percent have had an increase in juvenile-related crime.

- Curfews can be expensive for cities, too. Twenty-three percent, or 61, of the cities that participated in the U.S. Conference of Mayor's survey said there were increased costs to enforce curfews. For instance, officials in Chandler, Ariz., cited more paperwork, court appearances and time officers spent dealing with youths. Officials in New Orleans pointed to increased overtime for police. San Jose, Calif. officials said curfew enforcement hiked police payroll costs by $1 million.

- In addition to the expense, many parents and youth feel curfews violate their constitutional rights. Much debate has been raging around the nation regarding this controversial issue.

Other communities are working to prevent the problem of truancy before it begins by offering positive activities that increase students' interest in school, academic performance and confidence levels. For example:

- After-school programs can help children develop greater confidence in their academic abilities and a greater interest in school, both of which have been shown to lead to improved school attendance.

- After the Beacon Program in New York City increased youth access to vocational arenas, therapeutic counseling, and academic enrichment after school, police reported fewer juvenile felonies in the community. This information, provided by the U.S. Department of Education, comes from a 1997 publication called, "Keeping Schools Open as Community Learning Centers: Extending Learning in a Safe, Drug-Free Environment Before and After School."

- In a 1995 study, high school students who participated in extracurricular activities were shown to be three times more likely to score in the top 25 percent on math and reading assessments than their peers who did not. In North Carolina, high school student athletes had higher grade point averages than non-athletes. These facts are from the National Federation of High School Associations, "The Case for High School Activities," which was released in 1998.

- The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program, a cross-age tutoring program which trains older students to tutor younger students, has effectively reduced dropout rates. The dropout rate for students who participate in this program is 1 percent, while a comparison group's rate was 12 percent. (The national average is 14 percent.) This information comes from a paper submitted to the U.S. Dept. of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel, called, "The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program: Dropout Prevention Strategies for At-Risk Students."

- Students who spent as little as one to four hours a week in extracurricular activities were almost 60 percent less likely to have dropped out of school by the time they were seniors than their peers who did not participate, according to the National Federation of High School Associations.

* * *

ASSESSING THE PROBLEM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

It is important when looking at truancy problems -- or other issues facing your community -- that you not simply respond to national trends, but look at the local picture. Just because truancy is a major issue halfway across the country, it may not be the most pressing problem in your area. Rather than designing a program that addresses national trends, be sure to narrow in on truancy statistics and the contributing factors in your own community and figure out where your time and resources are best spent. You also want to be sure that any truancy programs you chose to implement will not backfire and make the problem worse. For instance, some communities have taken a tough stance against kids being late and refuse to admit them for the day if they are not in their classrooms by the time school starts. This actually forces kids who are late --many of whom rely on public transportation -- to be truant if they lose their bus fare or their bus never comes. Other communities have made the assumption that all kids who are truant use alcohol and drugs, when in fact a number of other unrelated factors are often the cause, such as family trouble, lack of transportation and trouble keeping up with school work. These kids may be punished by tough policies, instead of receiving help and support for their problems. Such responses are actually doing youth a disservice, so be sure to keep these things in mind when you design any programs in your community.

Here are some ways to assess truancy problems in your area:

- Look at school attendance records to see if unexcused absences are a big problem.

- Find out what the transportation situation is for students in your community. Could this be contributing to the problem?

- Check with teachers to see if kids who miss school frequently are behind in their schoolwork. Are there extra things that the school can do to help these kids catch up with their classmates?

- Ask the local police department if they have documented high rates of juvenile crime during school hours. Has the problem gotten worse or better lately? What measures are they taking to address the problem?

- Find out how truancy cases are currently treated in your community. Are the policies fair? Do they seem to address the conditions that exist locally? If not, what can be done to make them better match the reality facing youth in your community?

- Are there laws in place (i.e. curfews, fines for truancy, etc.) that may actually be making the problem worse? Since these laws were enforced, how have the numbers of unexcused absences been affected?

- Are adequate afterschool activities offered to youth to make them feel excited about school and learning? If not, help to start such programs and market them to at-risk youth to solicit their participation. Be sure there are options for a wide level of interests and skills.

- Make sure that afterschool sports and clubs in your community are accessible to all youth. If you think some kids may be discouraged by the cost for uniforms or participation fees, ask local businesses to underwrite the costs to be sure that everyone will feel able to take part.

- Consider the fact that some students may be dropping out of school because they need to work fulltime to support their families. How can your community help these young people to be able to complete their education?

- Look at the big picture. Have unexcused absences increased over the past few years? If so, what other changes have there been in the community that may have affected this fact? Tracking local trends may help you narrow down some of the causes of the problem and can guide you in developing solutions.

* * *

SOME ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

Once you have assessed local truancy problems, there are a number of things you can do:

- Generate public discussion of truancy issues and policies at school board meetings, PTA meetings and other public forums. Get the school board to create a communitywide group involving parents, the faith community, law enforcement, business leaders and others to address the problem.

- Talk to your District Attorney about the link between truancy, substance abuse and crime in your area. Determine how you can work together to combat the problem. By combining efforts and involving other groups, you can share resources and greatly increase your impact.

- Work with your police department to start a "truancy patrol." Engage local businesses, stores and residents to participate. When youth are caught skipping school, they can be sent back to class or returned home to their parents and reported to the school system. This will send the message to young people that your community is serious about reducing truancy, related crime and other problems.

- Encourage local schools and social service agencies to focus not only on truant youth but also to reach out to parents. Teachers can invite parents to volunteer their time, serve on committees or take an active role in decision making that involves their children. Schools should have a system in place to notify parents when their children miss class. Agencies should not only offer services for problem students but should also work with the families and offer counseling, education and support.

- Get youth involved in your efforts to reduce truancy. Kids can be the best advocates on issues that concern them. They can also get the message out to their peers that skipping school will not be tolerated.

- Impose a curfew. This is an approach that will likely be controversial. Some communities find curfews help reduce truancy and related crime. Other communities say that curfews prove too costly to implement for too little improvement. Some also argue that curfews challenge people's constitutional rights. What is your view? Consider if this option is a good idea in your city or town. Look at neighboring municipalities to see if they have set daytime curfews. If so, are these initiatives working? If you are interested in taking a similar approach, work with your local officials and/or your local elected officials to set policy for curfews that keep kids off the street during the day and in the classroom.

- Release an annual report to the community giving the current truancy rate, changes from prior year(s) and describing activities in place to address and prevent truancy, along with ideas of how people can get involved.

* * *

ELEMENTS TO ADDRESS TRUANCY

Recognizing that truancy is a serious problem, President Clinton issued a guidebook in 1994 to the 15,000 school districts nationwide which outlines the central characteristics of a comprehensive truancy prevention policy. The President stressed that truancy prevention programs should be developed in every elementary school so that at the first sign of truancy, police, social service agencies, and schools can join together to identify the cause and do something about it.

Below are some primary elements to combat truancy that you might consider as you develop your own strategy.

1. Involve parents in all truancy prevention activities.
Parents play a fundamental role in the education of their children. Therefore, they must work closely with schools to solve truancy problems. This entails developing mutual trust and communication between parents and schools. Many truancy programs provide intensive monitoring, counseling and other family-strengthening services to truants and their families. Schools can help by being "family-friendly" and encouraging teachers and parents to make regular contact before problems arise. Schools may also want to consider arranging convenient times and neutral settings for parent meetings, starting homework hotlines, training teachers to work with parents, hiring or appointing a parent liaison, and giving parents an active role in making school decisions.

2. Ensure that students face firm, clear and consistent sanctions for truancy.
School districts should let students know that they won't tolerate truancy. There are a number of ways that communities and states are getting the message out. For instance, some state legislatures have found that when they link truancy to items like a student's grades or driver's license they can help reduce the problem. Several states, including Delaware and Connecticut, have passed daytime curfews during school hours that allow law enforcement officers to question youth who are out on the street to determine if their absence is legitimate. And a few states, including New York, have deemed that when a student has an excessive number of unexcused absence, he or she can be failed. Meanwhile, Wisconsin judges may, among other options, order truants to attend counseling or to attend an education program specifically designed for him or her.

3. Create meaningful incentives for parental responsibility.
School districts need to make it clear that parents are ultimately responsible for their truant youth. To this end, a number of communities provide meaningful incentives for parents to ensure that their children go to school. These incentives can be tailored to meet the needs in each community and state. For instance, some states invite parents of truant children to

participate in parenting education programs. In other states, such as Maryland and Oklahoma, parents who fail to prevent truancy can be subject to formal sanctions or lose their eligibility for public assistance. Other communities provide positive incentives to encourage parents to send their children to school, such as increased eligibility to participate in publicly-funded programs. But no matter what approach a community takes, the important thing is that local officials, educators and parents work together as a team to develop programs and activities to combat truancy problems in their neighborhoods.

4. Establish ongoing truancy prevention programs in school.
There are a number of factors that contribute to truancy. These include drug use, violence at school, lack of importance placed on education within the family, problems keeping up with school work and emotional or mental health problems. With such a wide array of contributing factors, many schools are developing programs that meet the unique needs of each student. These programs include tutoring, added security measures, school breakfast and lunch programs, drug prevention initiatives, mentorship efforts through community and religious groups, and referrals to social service agencies. A number of schools are also offering opportunities for students to learn through career academies, school-to-work opportunities, and community service. Local business leaders can play in important role in these efforts. For example, business and community leaders may lend support by donating space to house temporary detention centers, volunteering as mentors, becoming Big Brothers and Big Sisters, and establishing community service projects that lead to after school or weekend jobs.

5. Involve local law enforcement in truancy reduction efforts.
School officials should establish partnerships with local police, probation officers and juvenile and family court officials to help deter youth from skipping school. Some communities have established temporary detention centers where police can drop off truant youth instead of taking them to their local police stations. In addition, police sweeps of neighborhoods where truant youth often hang out can be dramatically effective, as long as this is part of a larger comprehensive anti-truancy initiative.

6. Create positive activities to keep kids busy after school and get them excited about learning.
A number of communities have recognized that when kids participate in afterschool programs and sports, their confidence and grades go up and they are more excited about going to school. You can work with local schools, athletic organizations, youth groups, parents and businesses to make sure that there are adequate programs in place in your community to engage students who have a variety of interest levels and skills in afterschool activities.

(Five of these elements come from the guide, "Creating Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide," which also describes how successful anti-truancy initiatives across the country were planned and implemented. To order, call (800) 624-0100. The full text of the document is available through the Department of Education Web site at www.ed.gov.)

* * *

CREATING AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

A new report released by President Clinton (June, 1998) called, "Smart and Safe: Making After-School Hours Work for Kids," offers research and examples illustrating the potential of quality after-school activities to keep children safe, out of trouble, and learning. The new report, produced by the Departments of Justice and Education, includes evidence suggesting that quality after-school programs can help:

* decrease juvenile crime, vandalism at schools, and negative influences that lead to drug, alcohol and tobacco use;

* strengthen student achievement;
* improve school attendance and reduce dropout rates;
* encourage more students to turn in homework;
* reduce the percentage of students held back a grade and placed in special education;
* increase aspirations for the future, including students' aims to finish high school and go to college;
* improve behavior in school.

If you are interested in starting a quality afterschool program, here are some steps that can help you get started:

- Build consensus & partnerships among key stakeholders to convey the importance of the after-school or summer program and involve them in its planning and implementation.
- Assess school/community needs and resources to operate before- and after-school programs.
- Design a program that provides learning opportunities for both children and families within the school and the community at large.
- Use community resources to effectively support afterschool programs by providing funding, facilities, materials, expertise, job shadowing experiences, mentors, tutors, and community service and learning experiences.

Create an advisory board to help maintain strong links among the community, families, community-based organizations, religious organizations, employers, and the school system. These boards can help the community conduct an inventory of existing after-school resources, such as opportunities at a Boys & Girls Club or local church, and identify the ongoing needs of a neighborhood.

You can access the full text of this report online at www.ed.gov/pubs/SafeandSmart/.

* * *

WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING

To solve local truancy problems, many communities are forming groups involving representatives of schools, law enforcement, parents, businesses, judicial and social services agencies, and other community and youth service organizations to create a coordinated response. Here are some examples of what others are doing. You can use these as a model to guide your own efforts.

Santa Barbara Takes a Communitywide Approach to Reduce Truancy

Alcohol and drug problems are at the heart of most of the truancy cases in Santa Barbara, Calif. Recognizing this fact, the District Attorney used drug forfeiture money to create an extensive communitywide anti-truancy program. The program reaches out to all segments of the community, and engages them as part of the solution. This includes teachers, school administrators, probation officers, mental health agencies, child protective services, law enforcement, Santa Barbara Fighting Back and other community-based organizations. A Multi-Agency Truancy Mediation Team coordinates the assessment process for a youngster and family, and develops an individualized plan designed to improve academic achievement, develop life skills and increase self-confidence. Participants have small classes, keep the same teacher for two years, receive mentoring, and engage in community service. There are also links to other services, including conflict mediation, alcohol and drug diversion classes, drop-in centers, health education, sober activities and

clubs, and stress management and leadership classes. Contact Penny Jenkins, Fighting Back, at (805) 963-1433.

Parents Take Active Role in Atlantic County, N.J. Initiative

Parents are key to the success of a truancy prevention program in Atlantic County, N.J. Called Project Helping Hand, the early intervention program works in 12 area schools and focuses mainly on kindergarten to third grade students who have a high number of unexcused absences and also involves their parents. The truant youth and their families meet with counselors, who use a variety of intervention strategies and resources, including signed cooperative agreements among parents, youth, and the school. The counselors also help participants gain access to a variety of local services, including food stamps, day care, medical services, substance abuse, psychiatric, parent support, and single-parent programs. Counselors strive to use extended family members as a support system and to involve the family with the school as often as possible so that they understand school procedures and are comfortable working with the school on their child's behalf. Home visits are also done to encourage cooperation. If parents resist participating or school attendance does not improve, the case may be referred to the Family Court. For the 1995-96 school year, 84 percent of the students who participated experienced no recidivism following their completion. These results are consistent with previous years. Contact: Sally Ann Williams at (609) 645-5862.

Crime is Down, Learning is Up, in Los Angeles Schools

School-based crime is down by 40 to 60 percent in Los Angeles schools, thanks to a citywide program that involves the L.A. Unified School District, the city, the state department of education and private sector businesses. Called LA's BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow), the initiative provides 5,000 students in 24 schools across the city with academic tutoring and instruction, a safe haven for enrichment and recreation, and an opportunity to develop self-discipline, self-confidence, and interpersonal skills. The program runs Monday to Friday from when school ends until 6 p.m., serving children in neighborhoods vulnerable to gangs, crime, and drugs. Participants receive help with their homework, engage in learning activities, and take part in clubs ranging from computers to cooking, organized sports, field trips, and the arts. Independent evaluations have shown that children who participate in LA's BEST get better grades, have greater enthusiasm for regular school and show positive changes in behavior. Contact: Carla Sanger at (213) 847-3681.

Communitywide Program Offers Safe Haven for Waco, Texas Youth

Kids in high-crime neighborhoods in Waco, Texas, now have somewhere safe to go after school, thanks to the Lighted Schools Project there. This program provides over 650 middle school youth in schools throughout the community with safe, supervised environments four days a week from 3:45 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Thirteen community agencies provide after-school services and programs for students and families who participate. While the program targets at-risk youth, all middle school youth can take part in the free activities, including sports, crafts, special events, and art instruction. Students also have access to primary health care if it is needed, and may take part in small group activities addressing issues such as building self-confidence, making positive choices, violence prevention, dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, and conflict resolution. Some of the schools provide children with tutoring and homework assistance, others participate in community volunteer projects. Additionally, a number of students each year are matched with a Baylor University student, who commits to mentoring a student for the entire year while participating in a college course on mentoring skills. Other community partners include local school districts, a hospital, the city recreation department, the community arts center, and a local council on alcohol and drug abuse prevention. Children who participate in Lighted Schools say they appreciate having a safe place to go after school, that it keeps them off the streets, and that it is more fun than sitting at home in front of the television. Several say that if the program did not exist, they would probably be in trouble. In a 1997 evaluation, 57 percent of students improved their school attendance. Contact: Joyce Reynolds at (254) 753-6002 ext. 207.

Program Creates New Opportunities for Kids in Manchester, N.H.

An afterschool program in Manchester, N.H., provides unlimited opportunities for 80 children ages 5-14 who attend school in a high-crime neighborhood there. The Y.O.U. (Youth Opportunities Unlimited) Program focuses on community collaboration and comprehensive approaches to supporting children, one-on-one attention, high expectations and strong links to the school, family involvement, and life skills training for students of all ages. For the younger kids, Y.O.U. offers an After School Adventure Program, which provides participants with help with homework and other learning activities. Fourth through sixth-graders take part in the Y.O.U. Peer Adventure program, where they can get extra help with schoolwork and join together in community service projects, such as a river clean-up. The Teen Program serves students in grades 7-12 and builds critical thinking skills. It also trains high school students to serve as mentors to middle school students in the Peer Adventure Program. Monthly family activities bring everyone together. Students benefit from the Y.O.U. program in a myriad of ways. For instance, they meet caring adults whom they can trust. They make new friends and develop social skills. They do better in school and attend more regularly. Their self-esteem and ability to solve problems improves. Contact: Andy Hamblett at (603) 623-3558.

Businesses Come Together to Support Youth in Lancaster, Penn.

An anti-truancy campaign in Lancaster, Penn., is getting its message out to the community with the help of a local advertising firm. The mayor of Lancaster helped create Lancaster United Against Truancy to oversee a three-year strategy to raise public awareness about truancy problems, educate parents about the importance of their kids attending school, and engage students in the learning process. Key to the campaign's success is the support of an advertising company called Agnew and Corrigan, which has produced public service announcements for the campaign free-of-charge. In addition, a variety of local media outlets have also donated space and air time to run the publicity material. The campaign was created in response to extremely high truancy and drop-out rates in Lancaster. Research indicated that multi-media would be one of the most effective way to reach the target population. Other components of the program include fostering community involvement, providing student guidance and fostering corporate sponsorship. Preliminary data shows that school attendance rates have improved since the effort began, and school dropout rates have gone down. Contact: Lancaster United Against Truancy at (717) 291-6289.

Schools Promise to Help Kids Reach Their Potentials

Schools of Promise is a new nationwide program supported by America's Promise that reaches out to schools in communities across the country and encourages them to become stronger support networks for their students. Those schools that make a commitment to participate agree to link local kids with the resources they need -- such as mentors, safe places, supervised activities, health care and job training. All of these factors have been proven to help youth grow up to be healthy and productive adults. Schools of Promise provides hubs through which teachers, parents, local business leaders, the faith community and local community service organizations collaborate to support kids who need help and enable them to realize their full potentials. This program is one of many outcomes from last year's Presidents' Summit for America's Youth that focused attention on the needs of kids and identified the resources that all youth need to be successful. For more information, visit www.americaspromise.org/

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TIPS FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES

Many communities don't have a strategy to address "truancy" specifically, yet they are addressing it nonetheless, as part of their work to create healthy and drug-free communities. Join Together called a few leaders of groups in communities across the country to find out just how their work impacts on the issue of truancy and helps to prevent it. Here is what they said:

Calvin Allen
Executive Director
Springfield Community Center
Springfield, MO
"We are addressing truancy in a round about way. We've recognized that it is not just a problem related to individuals, but a problem rooted deeply in the entire family. . . . We offer a program called the Family Achievement Academy, where our primary focus is to work with the entire family. We do asset mapping to see what assets the family has. We look at what is right with the family, not what is wrong. Since one of the major causes of truancy is that kids are behind with their classwork, we also have a tutoring program after school to keep kids up to the grade level so their self-esteem is raised. But the key is that it must be a total community effort if it is going to be successful. In Springfield, we really have a community that is overwhelmingly supportive of youth programs and economically disadvantaged areas. Youth are getting a lot of support and attention they need."

Maureen Ketchum
Executive Director
Youth Leadership Institute
San Francisco, CA
"We've helped a lot of communities set policy for curfews in response to truancy issues. We get a lot of calls from groups that want help setting up a youth committee and engaging young people in the process to respond to truancy. . . . We also help communities do trainings with the police departments about how they can use youth as resources. We ask the youth to actually train the truancy officers, which works well and has been very interesting. In addition, in one community when a youth curfew was being set, the young people were very involved in the process. They actually set the parameters of the policy, and they went back and educated their peers about what the curfew was, why it was set, and what the consequences would be if they didn't follow it. "

Armentha Russell
Assistant to the Superintendent
Wellston School District
Saint Louis, MO
"Wellston is a small community, only three miles in radius, so we have access to most of our families. If a child is not going to school, we go to the home or call the family. We are small enough that we can really do outreach through neighborhoods within the community. For instance, we have a corner store where the proprietor is on our school board. If she sees any kids there, she calls and tells us. Everybody knows everybody. It helps because kids need to understand that they are part of the community. We don't have bad cases of truancy because we are able to stay on top of them. The school counselor, superintendent or principal go to the home if a kid skips. My advice to other communities is to have that outreach. Kids need to feel that there is a safety net out there for them. We are a little, poor community, and there are not a lot of businesses here, but the people care about each other. There is a lot of love. People stay in this community."

* * *

RESOURCES

You might want to contact the following places to learn more about truancy and how to prevent it in your community:

National Dropout Prevention Center
Clemson University
209 Martin Street
Clemson, SC 29634-0726
(864) 656-2599
www.dropoutprevention.org/
Located at Clemson University, the NDPC is a clearinghouse and research center. Its mission is to reduce America's dropout rate by meeting the needs of youth in at-risk situations. The Center actively participates with community and corporate leaders, and with practitioners in K-12 education by providing technical assistance, training, and resources.

The Center for the Study of Sport in Society
Northeastern University
360 Huntington Ave., Suite 161 CP
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 373-4025
The Center for the Study of Sport in Society helps develop programs that promote the benefits of sports. It oversees programs on the national, state and local levels that help engage youth in positive activities that increase their wellbeing and confidence.

National Association of School Resource Officers
P.O. Box 40
Boynton Beach, Florida 33425
(561) 736-1736
www.rt66.com/NASRO/
NASRO is the largest training organization for school resource officers, including school-based police and district personnel in the nation. School resource officers work to promote a better understanding of the laws. They also serve as a confidential source of counseling to students concerning problems they face and help them make more positive choices.

National Center for Education Statistics
Office of Education Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education
555 New Jersey Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20208-5574
(202) 219-1828
http://nces.ed.gov/
NCES provides the facts and figures needed to help policymakers understand the condition of education in the nation today, to give researchers a foundation of data to build upon, and to help teachers and administrators decide on best practices for their schools.

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362
(805) 373-9977
www.nssc1.org/
The National School Safety Center promotes safe schools free of drug problems, crime, gangs, truancy and violence.

ORDER JOIN TOGETHER PUBLICATIONS TODAY!

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Your Name: _____ Organization: _____

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City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ Email: _____

Your first copy of most Join Together publications is free. There is a charge for multiple copies in some cases. Please indicate below how many copies you would like of each.

_____ ***Treatment for Addiction: Advancing the Common Good*** (Additional copies $5 each) 1998
A national panel of experts has issued a call to action and public policy recommendations to improve substance abuse treatment and recovery in our communities.

_____ ***Take Action!*** (Additional copies $3 each) 1996
Report from a Join Together policy panel on five policies America must adopt to reduce and prevent substance abuse.

_____ ***Alcohol and Drug Abuse in America: Polices for Prevention*** (Additional copies $1 each) 1995
Recommendations on how communities can prevent alcohol and drug abuse.

_____ ***Community Action Guide to Policies for Prevention*** (Additional copies $1 each) 1995
Steps communities can take to strengthen prevention efforts.

_____ ***Save Lives! Report, Recommendations and Action Guide of the Join Together Policy Panel on Underage Access to Alcohol*** (Additional copies $7 each) Updated 1995
Recommendations and Action Steps to help communities reduce underage drinking.

_____ ***Health Reform for Communities: Financing Substance Abuse Services*** (Additional copies $1 each) 1993
Recommendations on supporting substance abuse services in national healthcare reform.

_____ ***How Do We Know We Are Making A Difference?*** (Additional copies $10 each) 1996
Substance abuse indicator's handbook to help communities assess local problems. (86 pages)

_____ ***Fixing a Failing System*** (Additional copies $5 each) 1996
How the criminal justice system can work with community leaders to reduce substance abuse problems in our neighborhoods.

_____ ***"Lessons Learned" Conference Reports*** (Additional copies $1 each) 1998
These reports detail the findings from three conferences on timely issues, including: how substance abuse programs impact health care; how community substance abuse initiatives change the way a community addresses problems; and how fighting substance abuse affects race relations.

_____ ***Monthly Action Kits*** (Additional copies $1 each)
Ongoing publications to help you make the link between substance abuse and other problems. Recent topics include: expanding treatment in your community; building on the president's call to action; and using youth sports as part of a community strategy. Use the information to raise awareness, reach out to new groups, and enhance your community's strategy.

$ _____ Total amount of money enclosed. Make checks payable to *Trustees of Boston University*
Fed I.D. # 042103547

You can also download these publications from Join Together Online at www.jointogether.org

FAXBACK: TELL US HOW YOU ARE USING THIS KIT!

How are you using the information included in this kit to address truancy issues in your community? Join Together wants to know. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions that follow and fax this form back to: Lisa Falk at (617) 437-9394

Name: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

1.) In the past two years, has the truancy rate in your community:

____ Increased

____ Decreased

____ Stayed the same

2.) Does your community have a coalition or group working to reduce or address truancy?

____ Yes ____ No

a.) If yes, please describe its membership. (Check all that apply.)

____ Parents ____ Media

____ Teachers ____ Law enforcement

____ Youth ____ Faith community

____ School administrators ____ Business leaders

____ Other (describe) _____

3.) What are the elements of your community strategy to prevent/reduce truancy? (Check all that apply)

____ Afterschool programs ____ Annual report to the community

____ Public awareness/media campaign ____ Tutoring/mentoring programs

____ Curfew ____ Home visits

____ Fines ____ Truancy patrol

____ Other (explain) _____

4.) What do you think is the most effective way to keep kids in school?

You can also email your answers to lisa@jointogether.org